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ABSTRACT

In an analysis of Japanese, Korean, and American elementary school reading textbooks to determine their differences, the weight and size of each book were measured, the number of pages totaled, and the content analyzed. Categories chosen for the content analysis included science (physical, life, and social science), literature, and basic skills. Among the findings are the following: (1) American reading textbooks are larger and heavier than their Japanese or Korean counterparts; (2) the number of pages in the American readers exceeds the number in the Japanese readers by 16% and in Korean readers by 7%; (3) 36% of pages in Japanese readers are devoted to science, 23% in American and 25% in Korean readers; (4) 28% of pages in Japanese readers are devoted to literature, compared with 22% in American and 0% in Korean readers; (5) reading and writing are not regarded as separate and distinct activities in Japanese and Korean readers; (6) 20% of pages in Korean readers are devoted to physical labor; and (7) 36% of pages in Korean readers deal with basic skills training, compared with 8% in American readers. (HOD)

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Size, Weight and Content Analysis of Japanese and Korean Elementary School Reading Text Books[1]

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We hear so much about educational excellence and educational reform nowadays. Almost 30 years ago, the Russians shot Sputnik into the sky, and, suddenly, there was a public outcry for educational excellence and educational reform. More recently, Japanese Datsuns, Toyotas and Hondas began to buzz along on our highways in great numbers, and, suddenly, we have our educational excellence and educational reform again.

Much have been said about Japanese management, Japanese technology, Japanese labor productivity, Japanese trade, Japanese economic policy, Japanese education, Japanese Sukiyaki,etc. We may cite the threat of Japanese education to loosen the purse strings which the Congress holds. After all, generals and admirals have been quite successful in loosening the congressional purse strings by invoking the Russian military superiority. We may cite superiority of Japanese high school students in mathematics, and blackmail parents and politicians into increasing funding for all the schools of education in America. We may ask our government to double the annual budget for educational research by convincing tax payers that American children are illiterate, uneducated, unable to think like good philosophers and unable to behave like good psychologists. America produces about 2000 Ph.D. engineers each year. Less than half of them are American citizens. The rest are aliens on temporary visa, having received secondary school science education in foreign countries. The impact of all the ongoing commotion about secondary school science education, on American technological leadership, is quite negligible.

Why pay attention to children's books when the real issue is the international trade war? To answer this question, we cite one classic example. The American patent index, which is an indicator of technology, began to decline in 1890, and nose-dived in the 1930's. This trend was closely paralleled by a trend of declining frequency of achievement imagery in children's readers (de Chambers & Moeller, 1962). One may be tempted to attribute, in honor of Spengler, the decline of the Western Civilization to elementary school reading text

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books. In order to resist the temptation to invoke an educational "Yellow Peril", it may be helpful to take a look at what reading text books Japanese children are reading.

Last year, I obtained, through a Japanese university student, Japanese elementary school reading text books. In a similar manner, I also obtained Korean elementary school reading text books. With the assistance of a principal of a local elementary school, American reading text books of comparable levels and content were secured. Since the Japanese and the Korean people have been acting more or less like dogs and cats historically, and since both Japan and Korea have been aggressive in economic growth, any difference in education between them as reflected in elementary school reading text books cannot be regarded as a factor responsible for their economic growth.

We measured weight and size of each book, and counted the total number of pages (see Table 1). For analysis of content, we chose three categories: science, literature and basic skills. When one hears about "Back to Basics", one is inclined to associate it with reading, writing and arithmetic. But we were interested in knowing what children are reading about in reading text books. Certainly, it is absurd to insist that children read in reading text books about reading, just because one reads in a history book about history and in a car repair manual about car repair. Reading is interdisciplinary. We decided to choose science and literature as two interdisciplinary content categories which reflect significant value emphasis in American education. The category of science is broken down into three sub-categories of physical science (Ph Sci), life science (Lf Sci) and social science (Soc Sci). The criterion used for the category of science is that the content be fact-oriented, rather than fiction-oriented, and that the content bear sufficient reference to existing scientific theories and knowledge. For the category of literature (Liter), the criterion was that the content be sufficiently creative, and be accompanied by author identification. Any article which was not accompanied by identification of original author was not included. This category was divided into two sub-categories of native author (Nat) and foreign author (For). For example, a story by Tolstoi, which is included in the Japanese 4th Grade reader, may be classified as belonging to the sub-category of foreign author. As for the categories of Basic Skills, content dealing with the skills of reading, comprehension, composition and grammar, belongs to this category. The measure of analysis of content is relative frequency of the number of pages. For example, if the total number of pages in a book is 100, and if the number of pages dealing with physical science is 8, then the measure is .08.

Inspection of Table 2, which contains mean measures over first grade through fifth grade, shows that the American readers were larger and heavier than their Japanese or Korean counterparts. The American readers were 26% larger than the Japanese, and 14% larger than the

Korean, readers. If American readers are full-size cars, then Japanese and Korean readers are compact cars. The analogy is rather tempting. In terms of the number of pages, the American readers exceeded the Japanese readers by 167%, and the Korean readers by 71%. To bind children to a large and heavy book, is to discourage the responsibility of completing a task in a reasonably short period of time. If finishing reading a book is a reinforcing outcome for children, then delaying such reinforcement for children has little justification.

As for the category of science, Japanese readers devote 36% of pages, while American and Korean readers devote 23% and 25%, respectively. The difference between American and Japanese readers is 13%. As for literature, again Japanese readers rank first, with 28% of pages devoted to literature, as compared to 22% for American, and 0% for Korean, readers. It is obvious that Japanese readers devote a greater number of pages to science and literature than American readers do.

One outstanding characteristic of the American readers is the fact that the topic of reading is scarcely accompanied by, or integrated with, intensive basic skills training. The Korean readers devote 36% of pages for basic skills training, while the American readers devote 8% overall. One characteristic which is common to Japanese and Korean readers is that reading and writing are not regarded as separate and distinct activities. Reading is used primarily as a means to teach writing. More than any other aspect, this aspect of integration of reading and writing reflects a basic social attitude which is not consumer economy oriented. The economic analogue of writing is production; the economic analogue of reading is consumption. One writes to send a message; one reads to receive a message. One writes to express and give; one reads to respond and receive. Reading usually consumes goods and services provided by others. One buys a book to read. Writing, on the other hand, does not usually cost a penny. Some even manage to sell what they write. Japanese and Korean readers are designed to train producers; American readers are designed to train consumers. The implicit notion that the economic analogue of writing is production rather consumption, is carried to extremes in Korean readers. Korean readers devote 20% of total pages to physical labor. The comparable percentages for Japanese and American readers are 2% and 0%, respectively. It is apparent that a definite relationship between emphasis on writing and emphasis on physical labor does exist. Near absence of reference to physical labor in Japanese readers may be, as with America, symptomatic of a highly developed technological society.

Children are children, regardless of racial, cultural or class differences. A study comparing educational ambitions of Japanese-American and White college students (Endo, 1985), shows that Japanese-American and White students are quite alike in that assessment

of intelligence or talent, and racial discrimination, are the least important factors influencing their educational ambitions. There is no reason to believe that elementary school students of various racial and cultural origins are different in this respect. Then why is our society, and why is our educational establishment, obsessed with intelligence and aptitude testing? Educational excellence must be judged in the context of the goals of the society. Educational excellence is merely a euphemism for attainment of consensus between students on one hand and society on the other, for agreement between students on one hand and teachers on the other. The fact that there is a definite relation between primacy of writing over reading on one hand and emphasis on physical labor on the other, rather than on consumption of goods and services, in Korean readers, strongly implies that education is not intended for consumption, but rather production, of knowledge, that education is a platform on which students, rather than teachers, perform; and that, in complete opposition to the educational philosophy of Confucius, learning is productive labor, rather than pleasurable recreation. Educational excellence in terms of intelligence and aptitude is quite irrelevant to the issue of educational excellence. Our children want to do. We want our children to be. Where is the consensus which is essential for learning?

References

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Endo, R. (1984) Race and educational ambitions: The case of Japanese Americans. P/AAMHRC Research Review, 3, 1-3.

Table 1

Content of Reading Text Books

Grade	Nations	Size	Weight	Pages	Ph Sci	Lf Sci	Soc Sci	All Sci	Liter Nat	Liter For	Basic Skills[a]
	U.S.	17.0x22.0[b]	385[c]	154	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.22
1	Japan	18.0x25.5	275	100	.00	.07	.21	.28	.00	.00	.29
	Korea	18.5x25.5	260	144	.03	.06	.09	.24	.00	.00	.41
	U.S.	18.0x24.0	265	264	.00	.24	.17	.41	.00	.00	.04
2	Japan	14.7x21.0	165	112	.08	.07	.00	.15	.24	.09	.21
	Korea	18.5x25.5	320	176	.02	.03	.26	.31	.00	.00	.36
	U.S.	18.0x23.5	450+	288	.06	.03	.02	.11	.00	.00	.06
3	Japan	14.7x21.0	160	108	.02	.14	.13	.29	.31	.00	.36
	Korea	14.7x21.0	180	160	.00	.03	.18	.21	.00	.00	.30
	U.S.	18.0x23.5	450+	377	.00	.04	.19	.23	.01	.00	.09
4	Japan	14.7x21.0	150	124	.08	.10	.24	.32	.19	.07	.28
	Korea	14.7x21.0	250	208	.00	.00	.22	.22	.00	.00	.35
	U.S.	20.0x24.0	450+	478	.05	.05	.26	.36	.65	.03	.10
5	Japan	14.7x21.0	180	140	.09	.00	.32	.41	.34	.00	.24
	Korea	14.7x21.0	250	224	.05	.03	.21	.29	.00	.00	.32

[a] reading, comprehension, composition and grammar.

[b] in cm.

[c] in g.

Table 2

Content of Reading Text Books
For Grades 1 to 5

Nations	Size	Weight	Pages	Ph Sci	Lf Sci	Soc Sci	All Sci	Liter Nat	Liter For	Basic Skills
U.S.	426.4[a]	400+	312.2	.03	.07	.13	.23	.21	.01	.08
Japan	338.8	186	116.8	.07	.08	.21	.36	.25	.03	.29
Korea	373.9	252	182.4	.02	.03	.20	.25	.00	.00	.36

[a] in cm^2